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Letter dated 19 May 2004 from the Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to attach a copy of the address delivered by the President of the Republic, H.E. Mr. Laurent Gbagbo, on 18 May 2004 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Philippe **Djangone-Bi**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 19 May 2004 from the Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

My dear fellow citizens,

Dear friends of Côte d'Ivoire,

In the wake of the events of 25 March 2004, I, like you, witnessed the media campaign waged against our country, its leaders, its youth, its army, its gendarmerie and its police.

I waited in silence for all the noise to subside. There is never any point in trying to make oneself heard over noise. Today, that noise has subsided.

I have decided to speak, but not in self-defence, since I have no need to defend myself. What counts in life is to be on the side of truth. We have a clear conscience because we are on the side of truth.

I would again like to thank the international community which has from the outset rallied round to help us regain the path towards peace. I am particularly appreciative of France's commitment to our support, which has taken the form of troops on the ground, as well as the mediation efforts culminating in the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement.

I am touched by the unwavering solidarity of our brothers in the Economic Community of West African States who have spared no effort to support and strengthen the peace and reconciliation process in Côte d'Ivoire.

Côte d'Ivoire has never been alone in this crisis. In February the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1528 (2004) establishing the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI). The initial deployment of United Nations troops is welcome. We expect them to assist effectively in the disarmament and reunification of the country and in preparations for the general elections in 2005.

It should be recalled at this point that the international community's efforts can neither replace nor substitute for areas under our own responsibility. Those who think that a solution to our crisis can only come from abroad are mistaken. Our friends abroad can help us, but it is only here, by our own united efforts, that we will find the means to resolve the crisis.

To that end, we must remain ever mindful of the values that shape our common destiny.

I wish to point out again that the State has not collapsed and that the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement has not dissolved the democratic institutions of Côte d'Ivoire. On the contrary, it is the life of our institutions which lends meaning to the Agreement.

For this Agreement to be implemented, the country must be governed and Côte d'Ivoire is indeed governed. Our country has a Constitution which clearly shows where executive power lies. Côte d'Ivoire has a presidential regime. It does not have a party system.

Thus, in accordance with the vow I made to the Ivorian people, I intend to fully exercise the presidential powers recognized by the Constitution.

We are a country at war. I was elected to guarantee fundamental freedoms, but fundamental freedoms depend first and foremost on the right to life. The primary freedom is life itself, since it is the life of each individual and the life of the State which guarantee the enjoyment of such freedoms. It is in fact the duty of the State to protect the lives of the men and women residing in its territory and to guarantee their freedoms.

Anyone who threatens the lives of citizens tramples on these freedoms. Therefore, in our management of the Ivorian crisis, it seems unjust that we should have been asked to grant impunity to those who have taken the lives of thousands of our fellow citizens.

The Amnesty Act, which we agreed to adopt and promulgate, thinking it would bring us peace, turned out to be nothing other than a sanctioning of impunity.

In such a context, I could not allow rebels who are occupying a part of our territory and refusing to disarm to hold demonstrations in the area under government control.

It is inconceivable that an armed movement which refuses to disarm should seek to organize or co-sponsor a demonstration that would be peaceful.

The two notions are mutually exclusive. Either a movement is legal, legalistic, unarmed and respectful of all laws and regulations in the Republic — in which case it decides to organize peaceful demonstrations — or it is an armed movement which mounts surprise attacks on the Republic in order to dissolve it, in which case it cannot claim to be organizing peaceful demonstrations.

I would point out in this connection that the procession planned by the rebellion, with the involvement of certain political parties, for 25 March in Abidjan was scheduled just after the Government had issued a decree on 11 March prohibiting all street demonstrations until 30 April.

This decree, put forward jointly by the Minister of State for Territorial Administration (belonging to the Mouvement patriotique de la Côte d'Ivoire), the Minister of State for Justice (belonging to the Rassemblement des Républicains), the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Internal Security, was adopted by the Council of Ministers. All ministers, except those belonging to the Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire, were present.

However, even if there had been no such decree, I would still have banned the march, just as today I oppose and will continue to oppose any demonstration organized by armed movements in the area under government control.

As for the events of 25 March 2004, it is now becoming clear what happened. We now know, for example, that non-government forces were indeed involved. However, they are not what many thought them to be. Investigations are continuing, and those responsible at all levels will soon be identified.

At my request, the Security Council sent an international commission of inquiry to Côte d'Ivoire from 18 to 28 April 2004. The report that emerged raised questions and doubts as to the objectivity of the inquiry and the commission's impartiality. We wonder: was it a report on an inquiry or an indictment?

Accordingly, I welcome the fact that the United Nations has decided to send a new commission of inquiry which will conduct a comprehensive review of the investigations dating back to the fateful night of 18 to 19 September 2002. I am pleased that the Security Council has finally acceded to this request which I have been making since war broke out.

Indeed, this is what Ivorians have been waiting for: a genuine commission of inquiry.

My dear fellow citizens,

This evening I ask you to remain calm. The country is on its feet, the peace and reconciliation process is in motion. With regard to the implementation of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, the Government has done what it had to do. I ask Parliament to make haste so that we might complete the process.

Our goal is still the same, namely, to overcome the crisis by means of fair elections. The Linas-Marcoussis Agreement is not a sacred text, but we have decided to implement it for the sake of peace. We must be consistent.

Today, the facts speak for themselves.

One cannot claim to be for the Agreement if one refuses to respect the Constitution.

One cannot claim to be for the Agreement if one boycotts the Council of Ministers.

One cannot claim to be for the Agreement if one refuses to respect the authority of the Chief of State.

One cannot claim to be for the Agreement if one refuses to disarm.

One cannot claim to be for the Agreement if one is not for reunification of the country.

One cannot claim to be for the Agreement if one is threatening to secede from Côte d'Ivoire.

I therefore reiterate my appeal to all the parties and movements that have asked ministers to suspend their participation in government activities to rein themselves in, return to the Agreement and return to the Republic.

There can be no Government without a Council of Ministers, and the title of minister means nothing without participation in the Council of Ministers. Côte d'Ivoire needs its Government.

I ask the Prime Minister to make every effort to ensure that the Council of Ministers meets as soon as possible.

Up to now I have refrained from taking punitive measures, bearing in mind the special situation the country is in and the very composition of the Government. I continue to have confidence in everyone's sense of responsibility.

However, the situation cannot continue indefinitely. I have thus decided upon the following measures:

For May 2004, no salary or other remuneration will be paid to those members of the Government who deliberately boycotted the meetings of the Council of Ministers. This concerns the ministers belonging to the Parti democratique de Côte d'Ivoire, the Rassemblement des Républicains, the Union pour la démocratie et la paix en Côte d'Ivoire, the Mouvement des forces d'avenir, the Mouvement patriotique de la Côte d'Ivoire, and the Mouvement pour la justice et la paix. The full amount of those emoluments will be paid to the victims of war.

The Prime Minister shall confiscate all government vehicles assigned to ministers who intend to continue boycotting the Council of Ministers.

The Prime Minister must take urgent steps to ensure that no minister continues to be housed in the Hôtel du Gulf. It is time for all ministers to receive equal treatment. There must be an end to the ghettoization of the ministers who support the rebellion. It is therefore imperative for the Minister of Construction and Urban Planning to make every effort to ensure that all ministers of the Republic are housed in similar conditions.

I have noticed that Ivorian ministers have been roaming around the world. Some are even travelling at public expense for purposes harmful to Côte d'Ivoire. This I cannot accept. From now on, therefore, members of the Government may travel abroad only with authorization from the Head of State.

I have given the Prime Minister a list of individuals whom I no longer wish to take part in the Government of Côte d'Ivoire. The Linas-Marcoussis Agreement requires us to ensure balance in the composition of the Government, but it does not bind the fate of the Republic to specific individuals.

The Government of the Republic must function with ministers who wish to work for the country. Our people have suffered too much from war. We have no right to prolong their sufferings by allowing the State to become still more fragile.

I am thinking this evening of the people living in the areas under siege, particularly the vulnerable individuals overtaken by war and now held hostage by the rebellion: the elderly, women and children who were unable to flee.

Their pain is our pain. I ask them not to lose heart, to have confidence in the Ivorian nation. I cannot forget them. We must not forget them. It is for their sake that I am fighting to liberate the country, the whole country.

As I have said, and as the international community now also recognizes, peace and security in Côte d'Ivoire depend on peace and security in all the States in the West African subregion.

This is why I am following with interest the positive evolution of the political situation in Sierra Leone and Liberia. It is why I intend to participate in the Summit of Heads of State of the Mano River Union. It is also why I welcome our country's admission to membership of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States.

My dear fellow citizens, peace is afoot. Let's get to work in a spirit of confidence and solidarity.

May God bless Côte d'Ivoire!